

Triumph of Football

As all roads now lead to Chicago, Illinois, where the world's greatest single sports extravaganza kicks off today, much of the host nation is either listless or simply ignorant of the event. Apart from that small dampening effect on the World Cup '94, the 15th of its kind, almost the entire planet is gripped by a football fever. With Germany, the reigning champion, taking on Bolivia, which return to the elite club after a long absence, in the opening match, people across the world will be feasting on a gala release of a consummate contest involving a sudden rush of their adrenalin.

Well, people the world over have waited for this moment for the last four years and it is only natural that they want to be amply rewarded. The expectation rises high. Sometimes the tournament lives up to that expectation, sometimes not. But there is no dearth of speculation and anticipation about the prospect of the leading football teams. But this time prior analysis and predictions have been wide and inconclusive as they were never before. The reason is rather reassuring. It is good that the soccer pundits can no more agree on one or two clear favourites. The message is clear: the gaps between and among the teams playing at the top level are fast narrowing to the minimum.

It is not the sheer greater number of countries competing for the Jules Rimet Cup that makes this tournament special but there are a lot of other elements that will keep the spectators at the stadiums proper or the two billion plus TV viewers captivated to the game. Professional football, like many other sports, has gone through radical changes with business tycoons taking hold of the financial reins of famous clubs almost everywhere, particularly in Europe. Millions of dollars are transacted for attracting foreign players and also for changing clubs in a single league in Europe.

And where there is money there are media. Media have fanned football fans' craze for the game to its crescendo. Today players like Maradona, Gullit, Basten, Baggio have become household names almost all over the world — except perhaps the USA — thanks to the media. So the interest generated long before the actual occasion arrives, football lovers — informed as they are — want to be involved in the affairs as thoroughly as possible. But the media hype is not all. The professional footballers and their coaches have taken the game to the level of big business. So there is no scope for neglecting the trade at the highest level of the show. A little mistake can prove highly costly for one's career. So the compulsion is for perfecting the art at its magical best. So much is at stake.

Naturally, the US '94 World Cup has provided soccer lovers with the opportunity to see the deft touches, swerving free kicks, clever and adroit passes, breath-taking dribblings, curling volleys and equally agile punching or gripping in of the ball by the flying goal-keepers; and more than anything goals scored only in dreams. All this and many more of the game's tricks that fire the imagination and stir the passion to a dizzy height. For long one month beginning today, people will think in terms of football, and even act in terms of football. Much of their time will be taken away by this small round thing always on the roll. Football-minder, the people of the world however are going to be wiser after the show has been over. After all, in this world of impermanence, the players have pitted their very best against each other for a whole month.

Whoever wins is immaterial in the sense that someone has to among the 24 teams. The ultimate winner is man for he has developed a game so simple and yet so beautiful and artistic that anyone following this for a while can understand it and chances are there that he will fall in love with it too. Hail the '94 World Cup! Hail football!

A Short-cut to Home Ownership

A Xinhua news item makes us sigh over not having a house of our own. Not so plaintively, for a change, but with a glimpse of a silver-lining around the cloud. In sum it says, Americans have come to value home ownership so much that they are ready to make many trade-offs to achieve it: postpone retirement, take a second job, commute long distances and spurn a good job in the city just to avoid staying in a rented house — all to avail themselves of mortgage finance, the most popular institutional means to own a house in the West.

The basic motivation to own a house is the same everywhere — getting a toe-hold on "financial, psychological and familial security". It can push the owner and his family to new heights of financial achievement. Societally, the neighbourhoods grow and the economy advances. There can be a greater turn-out in local polls.

Home-owning is few and far between in our context where the prohibitive cost of land in particular rules out even a modest housing project for most middle class people. But it is in the head, as they say, most battles are either won or lost. If a person can develop a strong motivation, an inner drive to own a house, he or she will have made the first leap-forward in achieving the goal. Basically, however, the flurry to own houses within city limits has to go. It needs badly to be replaced by realism to move to the suburbs of Dhaka, even to ones' own district towns. Why not? Life is less polluted there and what has Dhaka to offer by way of retreat at one's old age? Even for working men and women, the vastly expanding circles of suburban areas should be beckoning them with their low land costs, idyllic charm and the whole range of potential for a wholesome and creative lifestyle. The exodus of young people from Tokyo towards the outskirts in an ever-increasing number should be an eye-opener. Even the rural poor who are migrating to Dhaka will be trekking back to the villages or semi-urban areas following the footsteps of the educated people. There can be a tremendous lift-pump effect on the whole economy by virtue of this reverse migration. Imagine the benign cultural impact of this as well, with of perhaps, better political behaviorism following a dip in the go-getting restlessness and stressful rat race in the city.

A noticeable degree of dispersal of homes, away from the city, has already taken place. The pioneer settlers had, of course, their share of problems — with amenities, law and order and medicare — but ask anyone of them, say, at Savar or Gazipur, he will tell you that there is no greater propulsion to drawing amenities home than living itself.

I f a candidate has still to qualify in English before appearing in examinations that the Indian Union Public Service Commission conducts for central government jobs, Home Ministry is to blame. The bar lapsed on January 26, 1965 when the constitutional obligation made Hindi India's principal language and when English was continued as an additional language. It was bilingualism, with no letter or favour for either of the two.

The Ministry's spokesman informs me that the qualifying paper in English was introduced in 1979, following the Ko thari Commission's recommendations on the new syllabus for the competitive examinations. However, parliamentary affairs minister V C Shukla told the Lok Sabha earlier in the month that the government proposes to have English as a qualifying paper, but no decision has been taken so far. Someone has bungled somewhere. Now contradictory positions are being taken to cover up the mistake.

In fact, the decision on this point was forced upon the government within eight months of Hindi becoming the principal language. It faced a piquant situation when one candidate answered his question papers in Hindi instead of English in the competitive examination held in September, 1965. The UPSC awarded him zero. Its chairman at that time, B N Jha, who had earlier served as Home Secretary, was not sure whether it was legally tenable to reject the answers in Hindi

Ill-informed Debate on Language

after it had become the principal official language. He referred the matter to the Law Ministry for opinion.

The Law Ministry justified the zero mark, arguing that the UPSC was like a club framing its own rules of entrance. Just as the UPSC, it was contended, did not allow any candidate below 21 or above 23 (this was the age group at that time for competition), it could similarly lay down that English would be the medium of examination. The candidates had to fulfil that obligation in the same way as persons wanting to become members of a club had to live with its bye-laws.

But Jha did not accept the Law Ministry's opinion and referred the matter to the government. Lal Bahadur Shastri, then prime minister, saw the point. He placed the matter before the cabinet, which decided in 1965 itself to permit examinations in all Indian languages mentioned in the Eight Schedule of the constitution, namely, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and Sindhi. English, which is not listed in the Eighth Schedule, was allowed to continue as an alternative medium of examination.

Subsequently, both houses of parliament adopted a formal resolution that "all the languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the constitution and English shall be permitted

as alternative media for all India and higher central service examinations". That should have settled the controversy.

But the UPSC and the Home Ministry's bureaucrats dragged their feet and did not implement the resolution straightaway. They wanted only English and Hindi as the media of examination. In the meanwhile, political pressure from the states got built up and it became so strong that there was no going away from regional languages. The gov-

ernment had to concede that English and the regional languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule would be the media of examination. The announcement came into effect in October 1969.

In the face of all this, if Home Ministry reintroduced 10 years later English as the qualifying paper, it played with fire. It meant that some English speaking bureaucrats wanted to keep Hindi and regional languages down. Thank goodness, the debate in parliament the other day did not last long or develop into a familiar confrontation between Hindi and English. Otherwise the very compromise reached between the north and the south over the language in the

sixties, after wide disturbances and the loss of lives, would have been in jeopardy. The compromise reached was that Hindi would be the principal official language of India from January 26, 1965 and that English would continue to be used for all such purposes as was done before that date. As regards the switch-over to Hindi, it was agreed that English would not be dropped until the state legislatures, which did not have Hindi as their official language,

ordered that the marks secured in the interview should be added to the marks obtained in the written examination for the final result. That has been the practice since. It has helped such students as do not speak English well. Had this been the centre's attitude all along, the distance between English and Hindi and regional languages would have been spanned long ago.

But the few English-speaking Indians do not realise what is happening on the ground. The states have switched over to their own language and the people are conducting the business in their mother tongue. To tell them that they must qualify in an English paper before they become eligible for examinations to central government jobs is to stoke the fire of linguistic differences, which are subdued at present.

At present it is difficult even to make Hindi a qualifying paper, the language which has the premier status. Had English and Hindi been made qualifying papers on January 26, 1965 itself, when both became link languages, the arrangement would have gone through. Now regional languages, enjoying the status of a national language, cannot be pushed around, good for one purpose and useless for another.

English cannot be anything but a secondary language. In the nature of things mass education has to be in our own

languages. English should be taught to a large number of people and it is heartening that it is a compulsory subject in many states. We also cannot run away from the fact that a large number of people in the different parts of the country cannot converse with one another in any language except English. Still it is a relic of the past and confined to a particular category.

When India was in the midst of controversy over the union's official language, C Rajagopalachari, India's first governor-general, wanted English to be 'imposed' on the country for all times. Ironically, he could not make even the Swatantra party, when he was its member, agree to the policy on English. In comparison, K Kamaraj, an outstanding figure from the south, said publicly that 'Hindi had been chosen to be a common language to maintain the unity of the country politically and administratively'. That represents the consensus.

If Hindi zealots could only be patient! Hindi has practically spread all over. They do not have to push it. Their chauvinism is the greatest danger to the language. At the same time, let us not fritter away the advantages we have because of the knowledge of English, which is a language of science, technology and business in today's world. Hindi will one day replace English but there can be no timetable. It should be left to the non-Hindi speaking people to decide when they want to switch-over to Hindi.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

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said they would do so through a resolution.

That the Home Ministry should have tried to go against the letter and the spirit of the compromise indicates the arrogance some in New Delhi have towards the common man, who does not either read, write, speak or understand English. The ministry should be held accountable for the confusion it has created.

Like qualifying in English, passing in interview (viva voce) was compulsory at one time. In 1959 when Govind Ballabh Pant was home minister, it was brought to his notice that a candidate, who stood first in the written test, did not make the selection because he failed in the interview. Pant then

The Daily Star Public Debate: What do Our Readers Think?

Strengthening of the Election Commission and the Bureaucracy may Ensure Fair Election

by A R Khandaker

THANKS TO The Daily Star that they have provided an opportunity to our politicians and others to express their view on the mode of holding the next national election.

Some of the Awami League leaders are of the opinion that they will not accept anything less than a caretaker government to conduct the next general election. They feel that BNP government has failed to remain neutral during election. As example, they cite the by-elections of Mirpur and Magura.

The BNP leaders hold that there is no provision in the constitution to have a caretaker government. Moreover, they are not obliged to hand over power to a caretaker government during their term of office for five years for which they were voted to power by the People.

From AL side arguments were also put forward that constitutional provisions can be made for having a caretaker government.

Mr. Mustehuddin Ahmad, ex-ambassador who wrote on the subject, had initially touched upon the crux of the main problem that is whether we want a fair election or we want a caretaker government. He had suggested that the Election Commission must be strengthened and they must have an office in each district where an ADC may be put in charge. The administrative functionaries, including the police, must be put under the charge of the Election Commission.

Mr. Nazrul Islam an ex-Foreign Secretary, ex-Ambassador and presently an advisor to BNP has argued that a caretaker government is not an in-built component of a democratic order. He concludes

thus: "The current debate should be on the prevention of irregularities in the national or other polls rather than on the caretaker government issue. If we agree on this, the task before us would be to devise ways and means to vest the Election Commission with greater competence and wider authority and ensure that its writ runs fully everywhere".

While the nation is engrossed in a debate on such a vital issue, I like to state certain points which perhaps have escaped our notice so far.

The whole debate starts from the premises that the opposition had lost faith in the ruling party's (BNP) conduct in holding an election. Therefore they demand that BNP must resign and a caretaker government should hold the election as was the case when Ershad resigned handing over power to the Chief Justice who formed a caretaker government. The situation then was not identical with the present one. An autocratic ruler having been forced to resign had no other alternative than to hand over power to some one neutral having the confidence of all the political parties who were all partners in their struggle for the removal of the ruler concerned.

The sole objective of the struggle was transition to a democratic way of life. Ershad's crime was that he had overthrown a democratically elected government and created a vested interest by doling out favour to some, and to legitimise his autocratic decisions, created a rubber stamp parliament.

After the fall of Ershad, the whole nation was caught in a frenzy of merry-making. High hopes were raised that the future will be rosy. An election was held under

the caretaker government which was acclaimed by many as fair. But was it really so? The leader of the Opposition maintained that there was 'subtle rigging'.

A close look at the way the election was conducted will reveal that voters' list was improperly prepared. Apart from the fact that many were not included in the list, there were other clerical mistakes of different descriptions. But what was worse was that the polling centres were irregularly fixed. Voters of one area had to go to a different area for casting their votes. In rural areas this created insurmountable problems, particularly for the women and the elderly voters. There were also complaints that some musclemen visited the houses of some section of the voters and held out threat prohibiting them from going to the polling centres.

BNP formed government. Democracy was ushered in. Everyone expected that democracy will march ahead, democratic institutions will grow up, democratic norms will be adhered to and democratic practices will pervade our day to day life.

There are, however differences of opinion as to the degree of fulfilment of the above aims and aspirations. But it is not at all a pleasant sight that the opposition parties walk out of the assembly failing to discuss a national issue. A hartal is called, whose economic implication to the life of our nation is considerable.

To make democracy worth its name, a sovereign parliament is necessary. The party in power and those in the opposition must work to make the parliament effective and meaningful. The voice of even a lone member must receive due

respect and consideration and not just be silenced by a mere force of numbers, devoid of rationality. The logic that a particular political party has come to power with the mandate of the people and therefore it is entitled to doing or undoing anything, is a fallacious one. This breeds a despotic attitude and leads to arbitrary actions, which is highly incompatible with good governance. There must be an objectivity to uphold the truth and place national interest above the interest of the self or the party.

A few words about the role of bureaucracy vis-a-vis a democratic form of government. It is through the permanent and impartial bureaucracy that democracy finds its expression. Democracy can only be sustained when rule of law can be established, and to do that bureaucracy has to function in accordance with predetermined 'rules of business' and strictly within the limit of Govt. Servants' Conduct Rules.

They have to be responsive and humane. In transacting and dispensing various affairs of the country and in administering the criminal justice system, an equitable and uniform policy has to be followed and 'double standard' shunned. Unfortunately, our experience in these respects has been far from satisfactory.

Transfer of officers immediately before an election sometimes creates demoralization among the officers and in that situation they can hardly do their job fairly and squarely. Undue interference with the bureaucracy must, therefore stop. Omission or commission on the part of bureaucracy, if any, should be duly enquired into and action, if called for, should be taken according to rules and procedure.

To the Editor...

Letters on the Debate

Caretaker government, not essential

Sir, We are greatly alarmed by the attitude of opposition political parties. With their temper tantrums, which is manifested through their unreasonable demands — giving call for hartals, boycotting JS etc., they are rather creating a chaos. It eludes me why AL is so keen on the next parliamentary election to be held under a caretaker government. Last parliamentary election was held under one, but that too was not spared of the accusation of Shukha Karchupi (subtle rigging).

In the recent city corporation elections AL was the winner in the major cities and they did not utter a word about the election — whether it being free and fair or not.

We think that a caretaker government is not the solution for a free and fair election, an efficient election commission is the real answer. First, all persons eligible to cast vote must be included in the voters' list. Identity cards should be introduced and great care should be taken against forgery, so that no untoward incidents happen in the voting centres. Therefore, it is essential, that special attention

be given to improve the existing law and order situation.

We hope that the opposition parties would insist upon these points and refrain from unnecessary demands.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong.

Caretaker government or democracy?

Sir, I am sorry that I am late to thank you for initiating the wonderful debate on the issue of "Caretaker Government". Your learned writers have enlightened us about such a thing which perhaps does not have any place in the book of political science, nor it has any place in any book on democracy. But, sir, the sad thing is that having read all these arguments I am getting confused about the democracy itself, day by day.

Democracy is said to be a "gentleman's form of government". It works properly in a situation where the people are enlightened, well-educated, tolerant, honest, responsible, progressive minded, et cetera, et cetera. Existence of political parties and some form of election are two essential elements of democracy. But in a country

where the political parties are less characteristic and the politicians themselves often show anti-people stance, and in a country where ninety per cent of the population is illiterate, and many of the literate people are, unfortunately, corrupt, dishonest and selfish, how can one think of democracy faring well? Is only the ability to cast a vote simply by stamping on the ballot paper all about democracy?

We have seen the administration of all the major political parties of Bangladesh. We saw the administration of Awami League — they gagged democracy. We have experience with the government of Jatiya Party — they mauled democracy. And now we find that the BNP, the party in power, is playing with democracy. And what about the Jamaat-e-Islami of Bangladesh? They seem to have little faith in democracy. However, they are yet to show up. We have also the experience with a caretaker government. The peaceful election conducted under it was also questioned by the leader of an opposition party. She said that there was subtle rigging in the election. Ironically, she is now most vocal about a caretaker government for conducting another election!

In such circumstances, we are prone to believe that neither a party government nor a caretaker government is suitable for Bangladesh. In

Bangladesh, it always seems in the eyes of the opposition that the party in power is obviously bad; the people's verdict is wrong, and it is the opposition who feel that they are always right! The present opposition alliance seemingly to oust a freely and fairly elected political party under the demand for a caretaker government is peculiar and unfortunate. Why can't they give the party in power a chance to complete their term? People are there to judge and play their part.

Why don't they have any respect for people's verdict? Why can't they feel that they will also face the same fate, if they ever go to power?

From all these I wonder whether we are really unfit for democracy. Unfortunately, we cannot think of any national government as in South Africa. Is it because we do not have any Nelson Mandela? The people are actually fed up with the mockery of politics by the parties. They are actually confused about democracy itself because of the nature of the political parties. They feel that those who are now making much hullabaloo about democracy, virtually have little respect for democracy. So one may tend to imagine otherwise, even to the extent of a "Benevolent Despot". It is really democracy at stake!

A citizen
Dhaka

OPINION

Political Leadership and Policy

Alif Zabr

THE main political opposition party, which has undoubtedly the dubious knack of keeping itself in the headlines most of the time, independent of (solid) performance, is now under the media microscope mainly for dabbling in two highly debatable and controversial issues: the disruptive and mindless hartal calls (in the national sense; strikes are different, internal, and limited in scope); and proposing novel methods for routine assignments (for example, the creation of a caretaker government every time there is a general election).

In a section of the press, the leader of the party is under critical scrutiny for her leadership style and policies. The individual impact of a leader is transitory but telling, as leaders come and go, but the big party (and the country) remains. Historically, the current and future generations will examine more the party's policies of successes or failures, rather than who initiated those policies. The duration of hero-worshipping depends on the longevity of the good ideas.

The Awami League has effectively employed negative tactics to its advantage. This success does not mean a vote of confidence by the majority of the future voters at the next elections. A party may be powerful, but it does not mean that it has no weaknesses. The AL is turning a blind eye to its weaknesses and track records, and many positive assumptions are taken for granted. It better review its feedback system, from outside the party circles, and not from the inside coterie of sycophants and blind believers in the mighty party. As public preferences are fickle, and public memory very short, the re-minder goodies must be attractive and logical, not distractive and of transitory emotive appeal.

The shadow cabinet's performance is invisible; therefore

goods! One shall be ready to quit as soon as one has failed to do so. The electorate must be left free to elect their choice afresh.

The strengthening of the Election Commission will no doubt go a long way in securing free and fair elections, but also the bureaucratic machinery has to move along. They must be neutral and perform their respective duties without fear or favour, for which visibly certain concrete steps may have to be taken.

Besides, a few well considered measure can be adopted to ensure a fair election. It may be required to appoint a committee to devise such measures. And the committee, if necessary, may visit one or two neighbouring countries to study their systems before submission of their recommendations.

The writer is retired Inspector General of Police and ex-member of the United Nations' Crime Prevention and Control Committee.